part I

Youth

ONE

THE SETTLEMENT

Seventy-five years ago, anyone who took the Waldörfer train from Hamburg to Grosshansdorf and got out at Buchenkamp station found himself alone among open fields. Left and right, arable lands stretched away, divided not by fences but by hedgerows, banks of earth called *knicks* or *breaks*, grown over with hazelnuts, birches, and all kinds of bushes, which were roughly cleared every seven years. At that time there were no proper roads in the area, but simply paths or tracks for farm carts, and these were generally soft and muddy. If one arrived at nearby Wulfsdorferweg—a Weg, or path, of the same kind—one found oneself in front of four similar, long double houses, red roofed and built of bricks. In a side road with the curious name Im Berge, 'in the mountain' (although there was nothing but flat ground far and wide), there were two similar detached houses. This was the shared 'settlement' of a few teachers who, in the wake of the youth movement of the time, were enthusiasts for 'the simple life' (propagated by Ernst Wiechert) 'on their own soil'. They were led by the indefatigable visionary Helmut Hertling and his practical neighbour, the socialist Alfred Schär.

The gardens were grouped round a common playground and sports round, with a shared water supply and cesspit. A community hall, where music was to be taught, and a poultry farm had been planned, but these soon evidently proved to overtax the public spirit of the participants. However, there was a kindergarten (which I attended) and shared festivities, sports groups, neighbourly help—everything, in fact, which at that time belonged to a real community. There were many experiments, but not everything lasted. My parents joined in 1929 and built their house, 'Im Berge 4', although they didn't have a penny in their pockets and their

relatives thought them mad and offered no help. They wanted to escape from the 'grey city walls', and also from the housing shortage in Hamburg, and sought fresh country air and 'the basics' of life, a garden of their own and the fruits of their own labours. They neither drank nor smoked; there was only decaffeinated coffee, fruit juice, and margarine from the health stores. Every free moment was devoted to the garden. And my mother preserved beans, peas, and carrots for the winter.

My childhood was coloured by the spirit of this 'settlement', and by its problems as well. There was a group of boys about the same age (and at least four of them were called Jürgen, the name being a favourite at the time). We made expeditions to the neighbouring woods and marshes, and at ten years old, of course we all wanted to be forest rangers. In spring we leapt over the fires lit on Easter morning, singing the folk song 'Winter Adieu', and burning winter's effigy. We played football, volleyball, and hockey on our sports ground. We had a game of our own called 'Kippel-Kappel', which we played in the road with sticks (there were no cars); we played hide-and-seek in the cornfields and vied with each other in climbing the highest oak trees. We were country boys, and accordingly unkempt. There were annual sports days, under the supervision—no, 'together with'—the grown-ups. In 1937 I won the 'Olympic pentathlon', which consisted of high jump, shotput, horizontal bar, a board game, and musical exercises. It was the tenth anniversary of the founding of 'our settlement'. A sports teacher was engaged for the school holidays, and this Mr Sörensen gathered us together for early morning gymnastics and took us on bicycle tours. His sister taught the girls and their mothers a special form of gymnastics (Loheländer gymnastics) about which they were particularly enthusiastic.

Everyone was supposed to contribute actively to the community. Our neighbour Kurt Gaebeler (later my English teacher) drew us into his poetry writing. He put together a settlement magazine, which, however, died after only a few numbers. My later Latin teacher Arthur Kracke enchanted me with his violin in family concerts, although, like my father, I counted as 'unmusical'. The Stefan George enthusiast Maschmann never taught me himself (luckily for us both). He wrote a poem with the words: 'At dawn the spade already breaks the sod of the barren ground …' Helmut Hertling was also my teacher later at the local school. His visions were far beyond my childish comprehension, but they impressed me greatly. One day he wanted

to drain the Mediterranean and water the Sahara instead. He was the only pacifist in the settlement, and kept to it even throughout the Nazi period and the war. After the war, he led the peace movement in Hamburg.

All of us children were made by our parents to work continually and steadily in the garden. That was the miserable part of this humane community. We followed our fathers with hoe and spade. We planted peas and beans, we picked gooseberries and red currants, we cleared the paths and cut up vegetables—above all on Sunday mornings. My father solemnly called this 'Sunday work'. Two of his maxims made a deep impression on me: 1. 'Illness is a matter of the will,' and 2. 'First think and then speak'. There was no church in Volksdorf, nor would anyone have gone to it. As a reward for our Sunday work, we were allowed to learn swimming in the nearby bathing pool and were occasionally—but only exceptionally—given a 10 pfennig ice. Ever since that time I have loathed gardening and hated rewards.

My favourite neighbour was a painter, Fritz Beyle. 'Uncle Fifi' was a great and irreverent wit and, after all the solemnity of the 'settlement', could always make us laugh again. Unlike my father, he was a practical man. I was permitted to help him make built-in cupboards, and I admired him greatly. I often visited his workshop of an evening, and under his instruction made nesting boxes for the birds, fretwork objects, and once a complete doll's house for my sister Marianne. He rather liked me, and developed my manual skills. When he was made director of an art school in Hamburg in 1935, he built himself a studio in the garden, was given commissions for extensive murals, and often got me to sit (or more usually, unfortunately, stand) for him as a model. He could undoubtedly be grumpy and was not always an easy neighbour for my peaceable parents. Nevertheless, the friendship lasted for 40 years.

The settlement survived the Nazi period and the war. Apart from Arthur Kracke, who indulged in a theatrical flirtation with the Nazi party because he hoped for a career in the cultural sector, no one became a Nazi in 1933. Nor did any of the boys and girls become leaders in the Hitler Youth or the League of German Girls (BDM). People behaved in public as they were compelled to do, and otherwise lived privately for themselves, somewhat cut off, in our secluded area. This may well have been partly due to the shock over the fate of Alfred Schär. He was killed by the SA in the Fuhlsbüttel concentration camp in 1937. It was said that he had tried to help other

victims of the Nazi movement, but he was also a member of the International Socialist Task Force (Internationaler Sozialistische Kampfbund), led by the Göttingen philosopher Leonhard Nelson, and that was the first to be persecuted. Not much was said about this in front of us children, but we undoubtedly strongly sensed the sinister character of the story.

My parents married in 1923. My father was powerfully built—over six feet tall—and was pledged to a life of 'plain living and high thinking'. My mother, in contrast, had a cheerful and happy nature, and wherever she went, the clouds lifted. The two were remotely related, and their families in Hamburg and Schwerin knew each other well.

My father was his parents' seventh child and was born in 1897 in Hamburg, at a time when my grandfather was already very ill. He suffered from tuberculosis, the pulmonary scourge of the Hanseatic cities. My grandfather Johannes was a freethinker and lived in the optimistic spirit of the opening years of the German empire. He moved to Hamburg from Schwerin as a private teacher and soon opened his own private school in the Harvestehude quarter of Hamburg. He became a Freemason and Grand Master of the Heinrich zum Felsen Lodge. He wrote school books and pamphlets in the spirit of the Enlightenment, directed against the church.[1] Like Lessing, he believed firmly in the education of the human race for good, and for his gravestone in the Ohlsdorf graveyard he chose this verse:

> It will come, it will surely come,
> the time of perfecting,
> When man will do the good
> because it is the good.

The maxim is taken from §88 of Lessing's essay on the education of mankind. Johannes Moltmann took for his Göttingen doctorate a historical subject, the Empress Theophano. Feuerbach's 'Enlightened' writings robbed him of his family's belief in God. Like all Hamburg citizens, he welcomed the establishment of the German empire through Bismarck, which turned Hamburg's harbour into a world port, but he despised William II and his martial posturings. He had a portrait of Friedrich III, the '99 days emperor', hanging in his room. When he fell ill of tuberculosis, he could no longer teach. He had to give up his school, and his family was reduced to poverty.

In the upwardly-thrusting, middle-class society of the time, social decline was the worst thing that could happen. He still tried to invent new games and to write the histories of Hamburg families, but what concerned him inwardly were the philosophical questions of monism and the morally imperative idea of the good, which called for a heroic life. I still have a copy of Ernst Haeckel's book *Die Welträtsel* (popular edition of 1949), which came from his library. He died in 1910 and through his early death became the model for my then 13-year-old father, who all his life tried to come to terms with his father's philosophical writings. The children had to break off their education, and the private school became a boarding house for foreign students. Nevertheless, by giving private lessons on the side, my father was still able to attend the Johanneum school until the war broke out in 1914.

Like his brother Alex and his sister Irmi, my father was seized by enthusiasm for the 'free German' youth movement. True, as he himself wrote, the transformation from bookworm to 'child of nature' was physically difficult for him, but the idea of the alternative life fascinated him. He joined the 'League of German Ramblers' but liked best to go on walks by himself. My father was a born historian. He often stood outside himself, observed the life he was living, and took note of it. This gave him sovereignty but also made him lonely. In 1914, as a 17-year-old, he volunteered for the army and came back in 1918 with severe wounds, the scars of which we children saw with a shudder on his great body. He could tell fantastic stories. According to his version of 'the Flying Dutchman', in the end the pirates threw him overboard, and he drowned in the sea. We children gazed at him open-mouthed.

After a short time in the Bahrenfeld Freikorps (volunteers) in the fight against the Spartacus revolt in Hamburg, he wandered far and wide through Germany, sometimes with others belonging to the same youth movement but generally alone, this being his way of shaking off his experiences during the war. For a short, happy time, he studied in Heidelberg and then applied to the school authorities to take the necessary examination in Hamburg. No course certificates or the like were asked for. At that time, students were treated as 'academic members of the public' who arranged their studies for themselves. They were not, as they are today, treated as immature people unable to make use of their own reason without the guidance of someone else. He did not wish to take a doctorate, so as not to be cut off from ordinary people by a title. He then soon became a teacher at the famous

Lichtwark school, where he taught Helmut and Loki Schmidt, among others,[2] until this democratic institution was closed by the Nazis—the first school to be so—and my father was moved to an uncongenial school for girls. After 1933 the closer and more remote family went over to the Nazis, which left my father lonely. He fled into the military and forced himself to undergo the drill required of a reserve officer. But of this I shall have more to say later.

My mother came from Schwerin, and that was my youthful paradise. There was the dream castle on the lake, the Kaninchen and Ziegelwerder islands, Zippendorf, where people came to escape the summer heat, and the elevated atmosphere of a little duchy. My loving and good-natured grandfather, Friedrich Stuhr, was the director of archives and at all times a stalwart servant and upholder of the state. My grandmother, Anna Stuhr, came from the family of the Forest Director Dankwart in Schönberg and was always very much aware of who she was. My mother grew up in accordance with her position. Illness prevented her from completing her grammar school education, which proved to be a disadvantage to her when she married the learned teacher. For a time she worked happily in the museum and in Schwerin Castle and could tell us all the ghost stories in which it was shrouded. My mother was unusually easily roused to enthusiasm and entered so warmly into the lives of other people that many went away with lighter hearts after an encounter with her. During the war she read all Ernst Wiechert's novels and recounted them at table, so that I know them all without ever having read them. There is no doubt that all her life she felt inferior to my all-knowing, all-determining father, but we children realized later that it was she who supported him, not he her. Without my mother, my father would probably have sunk into solitariness and melancholy. She put a new heart into him through her admiration and praise.

My mother was my first love. When my father was called up in 1939, I was proud and happy to take over many of his tasks in home and garden and to queue for hours in all the shops with our ration books. Sad although the reason was, I blossomed and came to myself once my father was away. For me, 1939 brought the end of a childhood in which I had suffered through a lack of orientation. I woke up out of my childish dream worlds, and my mother—now alone—and my brother and sisters helped me into real life. They trusted me to do things my father would never have trusted me to do, and I was able to do what I had never expected of myself.

That gave me confidence. Life with my mother without my father from 1939 until 1943 was a great time for me; yet I missed my father for all that. During my adolescent years, I didn't know what was the matter with me, and I had no one who might have explained it to me a little. I shrank back from girls and was afraid of my unfamiliar feelings. I was never unconcernedly self-confident but was often plagued by fears of failure.

I was born on 8 April 1926 and grew up with a two-year older brother, Hartwig, and a three-year younger sister, Marianne. In 1937 my brother Eckhart was added to the family, and in 1941 my sister Elisabeth. I never knew my brother Hartwig, but he was always present to us. The day after he was born, he began to have convulsions and then developed meningitis, which after a week had damaged his brain so severely that he was unable to recognize anyone. My parents kept him with them until he was three, but this then proved to be no longer possible, and they put him in the Friedrichsberg hospital. He had no awareness of any kind. He must have been a sweet child, for the nurses called him 'our little prince'. Our parents visited him every Wednesday afternoon, and every time came back silent and with stony faces. They never took us children with them. In 1940, either just before or already during the Nazis' first euthanasia action, he died of pneumonia, as my parents believed. But that was what was always given out at the time. His fate and our parents' consequent suffering made a deeper mark on my youth than I realized. When I was born, my father wrote, 'Everything that was missing in Hartwig was with him a matter of course, good things and bad. After the terrible years, life was given to us parents afresh. For that reason we called our little Jürgen "Dankwart". That was the strange family name of Grandmother Loycke, and only we parents really understood the reason for it.' Our parents had Hartwig buried between their own graves, so as to have him with them in eternity.

In 1929 my sister Marianne was born. I was no longer alone, although the baby disappointed me by not being able to walk. But she was 'my' sister, and when curious neighbours' children gaped at her through the French windows, I defended her from them by breaking the glass. Marianne was a happy little girl who liked to join in all the boys' pranks. She swung on the horizontal bar in the neighbour's garden much more fearlessly than any of the rest of us. When we went to school, differences admittedly emerged. She was attentive, industrious, and successful, whereas I had my difficulties. She kept her Easter eggs for months, whereas mine were gobbled up

by the same evening. She learnt the piano, and with her long plait and her violin was a charming sight. In my case, my parents didn't even attempt any such musical training. So there was also a degree of rivalry in the struggle for our parents' recognition and affection. But that ended effortlessly when war broke out in 1939 and my father was called up. From that time on we were both there for our mother and our younger brother and sister, and we complemented one another harmoniously. There was always much to do, and we could rely on each other.

Now that I have described the context in which I grew up—the settlement we lived in, my parents and brothers and sisters—I must finally come to myself. For me, childhood was not an entirely happy time. It was often one in which I 'didn't know what to do'. Compared with my tall father, I was too small. Sent to school too early, I was always the youngest in the class and the least mature. As compensation I was probably endowed with an undue measure of imagination. When I walked through the woods with my mother, I saw dwarfs and elves everywhere and invented the wildest stories, which she very much enjoyed because she liked to imagine similar things too. I was supposed to be 'sociable' and play outside with the other boys, but I was often alone, and gladly so, dreaming of far-away things as I sat in front of the window. In the local school there was no teacher who awakened my enthusiasm, nor did my teachers find in me a pupil who could awaken theirs. I was untidy, was seldom attentive, and found it difficult to keep my mind on what I was doing. The flight of a fly in the classroom fascinated me more than what was written on the blackboard. In the primary school and my first two years in grammar school, my teachers clearly found me a trial. My marks were accordingly poor, and at the bottom of my reports was often the perfidious comment: 'Could do better.' This regularly enraged my father. 'Why don't you do what you are able to do?' He didn't see that I no doubt wanted *to be able* but couldn't manage the *wanting*.

When I was about 12 and had arrived at the lowest point in my development, my Schwerin grandmother intervened like an angel in time of need. She didn't put me down, like my father, but believed in me and encouraged me. In the school holidays she arranged for me to have riding lessons in the royal Schwerin stables, and looked on. For every 'A' I got at school, she gave me a riding lesson worth two Reichsmarks. So I learnt self-control on the back of a horse. In her highly cultivated home, I learnt

table manners and to pay attention to my appearance. She had silver tea and coffee pots, had a table laid in the garden, and in the house had the dishes brought up from the basement kitchen in a lift. She took me with her to the bathing beach at Göhren on the island of Rügen, and I even accompanied her when she joined the ladies belonging to Schwerin's society, with whom she played bridge. She was a proud woman and a beautiful one; I respected her greatly. In this way the Duchy of Schwerin became for me the opposite pole to the country 'settlement'. In Schwerin the pavement was called the *trottoir*, one walked round the *carree*, went onto the *peron* (platform) in order to get into the *coupee* (compartment), and waited for the *conducteur*. My grandmother even trained the wire-haired terrier Bonzo with French words such as *allez hopp*. French counted as the language of society at the ducal court, and to this society my grandfather Stuhr, the director of archives, belonged as a matter of course. French was a survival of the great world of the eighteenth century and was still cultivated in provincial Schwerin in order to distinguish its upper class from the ordinary people, who spoke dialect.

For me, Schwerin's bliss meant driving a scooter on made-up roads, rowing and swimming in the lake, taking Sunday afternoon trips to Zippendorf in the steamer *Pribislav* or *Obotrit*, and going on long horseback chases on the Grosser Dreesch, which was still a parade ground and not yet built-up. I played with my cousins, and liked one of them, Wolf Wagner, particularly. He was killed in Breslau in 1945 at the age of 17. It was in Schwerin, in 1932, that I had my first experience of politics: we were playing in a sandpit when a bigger boy came up to us, taught us to raise our clenched fists and shout 'Rotfront'. We stamped enthusiastically after him, raised our fists and cried 'Rotfront' until my aunt opened the kitchen window and called energetically: 'We are not Rotfront at all. We are Black-White-Red.' And so the communist revolt in the sandpit was crushed by the German National Party.

Above his writing desk my grandfather had a large mural showing the homecoming of wounded soldiers. Two hunting knives hung on his wall. My father got on very well with his father-in-law. The two were passionate genealogists and could trace our families back to the fifteenth century. Admittedly not much can be discovered about the name Moltmann. It means 'the man' of a farmer 'Molt' belonging to the Parchim region and is of Slavic origin, like 'Molotov', the hammer. My grandfather died before

the end of the war, and my grandmother moved to the west, to Hamburg, together with my mother's sister and her family. When I arrived in Hamburg with my first motorbike in 1953, she could not be dissuaded, 83 years old though she was, from jumping onto the pillion and letting herself be driven about. She lived to a great age because she was always interested in life—even though she drank as many cups of coffee during the day as she took sleeping pills at night. She left me a kind of religious testament which ends with the heroic sentence: 'In the end I shall enter into the eternal nothingness.'

My father was an authority in German, Latin, and history. With his fabulous memory, he was a walking encyclopedia, and let the less proficient person feel it. When I gradually emerged from my nadir and picked myself up, I threw myself into the subjects about which he knew nothing—mathematics, physics, and chemistry. I worked through mathematical textbooks on my own so that I could appear competent in lessons. In the top class I encountered a teacher of genius, Mr Magin, who only talked to the members of the class who showed an interest, and singled me out to be his pupil. Chemistry was occasionally the fashion in our school. We experimented on our own in our cellars with Bunsen burners and test tubes. A friend and I once blew up a tool shed in his garden with potassium chlorate and red phosphorous. There were even boys who hurt themselves badly through similar experiments. In pure physics, I advanced as far as Louis Broglie's book *Matière et Lumière* (Matter and Light), which appeared in German in 1943 with a foreword by Werner Heisenberg. I was in the middle of it when I was called up. My talent for languages was not much developed, but my school English was sufficiently voluble when I was taken prisoner by the British in February 1945. When I was 15, my feeling for lyric finally awakened. I read Goethe's poems and learnt them by heart; I read Novalis's 'Hymn to the Night' by moonlight on the heath and was completely transported. The German Romantics were music to my ears. In addition, I fabricated attractive silhouettes, until this artistic vein slowly ran out. But that was also due to the events which intervened in my life and changed everything. The sciences I took so seriously did not at that time make a realist of me. I remained a dreamer and longed for fresh horizons. I could surf for hours in the dream worlds of impossible possibilities, forgetting everything around me.